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Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2198
INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 0041

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, ET
SUBJ: THE REORGANIZED ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT--AN INITIAL APPRAISAL

REF: A. 76 ADDIS ABABA 12642, B. ADDIS ABABA 0021

SUMMARY: AN ELEMENT OF BALANCE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN RE-
STORED TO POWER RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN DIRG, AS RESULT OF
GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION ANNOUNCED DEC 29. COLLECTIVE
NATURE OF DECISION-MAKING PROCESS WAS REAFFIRMED, AND
SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF EACH LEADING POSITION AND
GOVERNING BODY WERE CLEARLY SPELLED OUT TO ELIMINATE UN-
CERTAINTIES AND ABUSES OF PAST. RELATIVE AUTHORITY OF
TEFERI BANTE, MENGISTU HAILE-MARIAM AND ATNAFU ABATE HAS
APPARENTLY BEEN PLACED IN CLOSER EQUILIBRIUM, AND
POSITIONS OF ALEMAYEHU HAILE AND MOGES WOLDE-MIKAEL
STRENGTHENED, OFFERING PROSPECTS FOR GREATER STABILITY
IN FUTURE AND POSSIBLY A MORE MODERATE APPLICATION OF
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POLICY. HOWEVER, REDUCED ROLE OF PROVISIONAL OFFICE
FOR MASS ORGANIZATIONAL AFFAIRS (POMOA) AND ABSENCE OF
ANY INDICATION THAT RESTRUCTURING DESIGNED TO FACILITATE
ULTIMATE TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN-LED GOVERNMENT RAISE
NEW QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER PMAC HAS NOT ENTRENCHED IT-
SELF DEEPER IN POWER, AT EXPENSE OF OTHER ELEMENTS OF
POPULATION WHICH HELPED SPARK REVOLUTION THREE YEARS

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

AGO. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER TEN WEEKS OF INTENSIVE DELIBERATIONS, PMAC HAS MADE DETERMINED EFFORT TO PUTS ITS HOUSE IN ORDER AND TO RESTORE GREATER DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE IN ITS OWN GOVERNING ABILITY, WHICH HAD BEEN CAST INTO QUESTION BY ASSASSINATIONS, TERRORIST ACTS, DEMONSTRATIONS, UNILATERAL DECISIONS WITHOUT CONSULTATIONS, AND MUTUAL INTERNAL SUSPICIONS GENERATED DURING PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. ALTHOUGH MANY OF CHANGES DO LITTLE MORE THAN CONFIRM DE FACTO SITUATION WITHIN DIRG WHICH HAS BEEN EVOLVING OVER PAST YEAR, THAT SITUATION HAD BECOME TROUBLESOME BECAUSE VARIOUS DIRG MEMBERS WERE PERFORMING CERTAIN TASKS AND TAKING DECISIONS PROBABLY WITHOUT FORMAL AUTHORIZATION FOR DOING SO. MOST OBSERVERS SEEM AGREED THAT BECAUSE OF PAST ABSENCE OF CLEAR DELIMITATION OF ROLES, MENGISTU HAD APPRPRIATED FOR HIMSELF TOO MUCH AUTHORITY. ON PAPER AT LEAST, CASE CAN BE MADE THAT RESTRUCTURING REPRESENTS ATTEMPT BY PMAC TO REVERT TO ITS ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF SERVING AS COLLECTIVE CARETAKER GOVERNING BODY, PENDIN ESTABLISHMENT OF POLITICAL CONDITIONS WHICH WILL MAKE POSSIBLE RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. CERTAINLY, IT DOES NOT IMPLY GRAB FOR GREATER POWER ON PART OF EITHER TEFERI BANTE OR ATNAFU, BUT RATHER A CAREFUL BALANCING TO ASSURE THAT NO ONE GETS DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT JOCKEYING FOR POSITION OR SUPPORT WILL AUTOMATICALLY CEASE. FOR MOMENT, HOWEVER, NEW SETUP PROVIDES SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY, PROVIDES MORE STABLE
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BASIS FOR PMAC TO OPERATE THAN EVER BEFORE, AND SHOULD REDUCE DEGREE OF TIME-CONSUMING INFIGHTING, WHICH HAS HAMPERED DECISION-MAKING IN PAST. ONE CAN ASSUME THAT, DURING COURSE OF LENGTHY DELIBERATIONS LEADING TO RESTRUCTURING, EVERYONE HAD AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK HIS PIECE. REPORTS FROM RELIABLE SOURCES INDICATE THAT COMPOSITION OF STANDING COMMITTEE WAS CONFIRMED BY SECRET BALLOT, AND ENTIRE RESTRUCTURING MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN VOTED ON IN RELATIVELY DEMOCRATIC FASHION. THUS, RESULT PRESUMABLY HAS BACKING OF MOST DIRG MEMBERS. ANNOUNCEMENT MAY SERVE TO BREAK LOGJAM, AS RESULT OF WHICH POLICY LEVEL DECISIONS HAD BEEN HELD IN ABEYANCE DURING PERIOD WHILE DELIVERATIONS WERE UNDERWAY, AND IN TIME MAY ALSO LESSEN UNCERTAINTIES OF MANY EPMG BUREAUCRATS BY GIVING THEM SOME ASSURANCE THAT THEY CAN GET ON WITH BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT. THIS, HOWEVER, MAY DEPEND UPON THE ROLES PLAYED BY THOSE PMAC MEMBERS ASSIGNED TO THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES.

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

2. IF INDEED PROCLAMATION OPENS DOOR FOR BETTER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, IT IS CONCEIVABLE FOR EXAMPLE THAT MANY DECISIONS AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL, WHICH HERETOFORE REQUIRED APPROVAL OF ENTIRE DIRG, MAY NOW BE ATTENDED TO BY CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL OF MINISTERS TO REDUCE DELAY. UNLESS HE IS GRADUALLY BEING SQUEEZED OUT ALTOGETHER, IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE THAT MENGISTU WOULD HAVE TAKEN ON THE JOB IF HE HAD NOT GOTTEN SOME ASSURANCE THAT IT PROVIDED HIM DEGREE OF REALY AUTHORITY AND NOT JUST A GRANDIOSE TITLE.

3. ONE POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL RESULT
MAY BE INFERRED FROM FACT THAT CONGRESS AS WHOLE NOW HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONFIRMING OR COMMUTING DEATH SENTENCES AND REMITTING PUNISHMENTS. THIS CHANGE IS SEEN AS ATTEMPT TO AVOID NECESSARY EXCESSES WHICH GIVE PMAC BAD IMAGE, SINCE IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED
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PAGE 04 ADDIS 00041 01 OF 02 041519Z

THAT AT LEAST SOME OF SUMMARY EXECUTIONS AND MASS ARRESTS OF PAST RESULTED FROM ABRITRATY DECISIONS ON MENGISTU'S PART.

4. TO NO ONE'S SURPRISE, PMAC HAS REAFFIRMED ITS MARXIST-LENINIST CHARACTER. WE FIND THIS INDICATIVE OF DEGREE TO WHICH COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION AND PERHAPS IDEOLOGY HAS INTRUDED ITSELF INTO TOP LEVEL PEMG THINKING. DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM IS NEW WATCHWORD. AT SAME TIME, NEW GOVERNMENT SETUP IS IN ONE SENSE A CURIOUS ANOMALY. INSPIRATION FOR ORGANIZATION IS CLEARLY EAST EUROPEAN, WITH CONGRESS, CENTRAL COMMITTEE, AND STANDING COMMITTEE EVIDENTLY PATTERNED RESPECTIVELY AFTER CENTRAL COMMITTEE, PARTY SECRETARIAT, AND POLITBURO. WHAT IS UNIQUE HERE IS THAT TWO YEARS AFTER REVOLUTION, THERE IS NO PARTY AND THAT THESE ORGANIZATIONS ARE STAFFED EXCLUSIVELY BY MILITARY MEN, ACTING AS SURROGATES.

5. SEVERAL IMPORTANT QUESTIONS REMAIN UNANSWERED BY PROCLAMATION. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT NO EFFORT HAS BEEN MADE TO INSERT EVEN SYMBOLIC CIVILIAN PRESENCE INTO STRUCTURE, DESPITE FACT THAT DIRG MEMBERS APPEAR AT TIMES TO BE SENSITIVE TO CALLS BY EPRP AND OTHER DISSIDENT CIVILIAN GROUPS FOR RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT, WHICH FALL ON RESPONSIVE EARS AMONG BROAD MASSES. ONE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT RESTRUCTURING WOULD REPRESENT ATTEMPT IN SOME FASHION TO DULL CUTTING EDGE OF EPRP PROPAGANDA, BUT THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO BEAR THIS OUT. IF ANYTHING, POMOA, THE ONE CIVILIAN BODY WHICH DID PLAY POLITICAL ROLE UNDER OLD SETUP,

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

HAS BEEN REDUCED IN EFFECTIVENESS TO MERE EXECUTOR
OF PMAC DECISIONS, OR AT LEAST THAT APPEARS TO BE
PMAC INTENTION. RELIABLE SOURCES ALLEGE NATURE OF
POMOA LIKELY TO CHANGE IN NEXT TWO TO THREE MONTHS.
THIS LARGELY RESULT OF DISILLUSIONMENT OF PRESENT
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PAGE 05 ADDIS 00041 01 OF 02 041519Z

POMOA MEMBERS, MANY OF WHOM JOINED POLITBURO ORIGINAL-
LY BELIEVING THERE WOULD BE SOME FORM OF CIVILIAN
RULE WITHIN YEAR AND THAT THEY WOULD BE VANGUARD.
POSSIBILITY OF SIGNIFICANT CIVILIAN ROLE IN NEAR
FUTURE APPEARS REMOTE NOW AND WILL NECESSITATE SOME
TRANSFORMATION OF POLITBURO.

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PAGE 01 ADDIS 00041 02 OF 02 041525Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 0041

6. IT ALSO REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW RESTRUCTURING
WILL AFFECT RELATIVE STRENGTH OF DIRG LEADERS.
OFFICIAL SOURCE (REFTEL B) WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE THAT
TEFERI, MENGISTU, AND ATNAFU NOW TEND TO BALANCE
EACH OTHER OFF. CERTAINLY, TO ALL APPEARANCES,
MENGISTU POWERS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN CIRCUMSCRIBED AND

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Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

THOSE OF OTHER TWO STRENGTHENED. BUT UNLESS TEFERI
SHOWS GREATER INCLINATION THAN HITHERTO TO EXERCISE
HIS POWERS, WE FAIL TO SEE HOW HIS ROLE IS LIKELY TO
CHANGE MATERIALLY. SIGNIFICANCE OF ATNAFU'S NEW
RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY MUST BE TESTED BY EVENTS.
ALTHOUGH, IF FOR NONE OTHER THAN PURELY SUBJECTIVE
REASONS, MOST OBSERVERS FEEL A LITTLE BIT BETTER ABOUT
HAVING SECURITY MATTERS IN HIS HANDS THAN ELSEWHERE.
IT ALSO NOT CLEAR WHETHER THAT RESPONSIBILITY IS
CONFINED TO "PRESENTING SECURITY MATTERS EMANATING
FROM BELOW," AS PROCLAMATION USGGESTS, OR IS MUCH
BROADER, AS INDICATED PARA 3, REFTEL B. CREATION
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PAGE 02 ADDIS 00041 02 OF 02 041525Z

OF NEW SECRETARY GENERAL POSITION FOR ALEMAYEHU HAILU
AND MOGES'S ACQUISITION OF RESPONSIBLITY FOR BOTH
POLTICIAL COMMITTEE AND SUPERVISION OF POMOA REPRE-
SENT BOOST IN FORTUNES OF BOTH THESE INDIVIDUALS
AND SHOULD FURTHER BROADEN BASIS OF TOP LEVEL AUTHORITY.

7. OVERALL, EFFECT OF CHANGES IS MODESTLY REASSURING
AND POINTS TO GREATER STABILITY WITHIN TOP LEVE OF
EPMG. FEELING IS ALSO WIDESPREAD THAT CHANGES MAY
WELL LEAD TO EXERCISE OF GREATER DEGREE OF MODERATION,
AT LEAST IN MANNER IN WHICH POLICY IS APPLIED, AL-
THOUGH NO NECESSARILY IN POLICY ITSELF. HOWEVER, IT
CAN HARDLY ASSUAGE FEARS IN SOME CIRCLES THAT ETHIOPIAN
MILITARY, HAVING TASTED POWER, MIGHT NOT ATTEMPT TO
RETAIN IT, DESPITE FREQUENT PROMISES TO CONTRARY.
FOR AVERAGE ETHIOPIAN CITIZEN, WHOLE EXERCISE PROBABLY
DOES NOT SIGNIFY MUCH CHANGE, UNLESS PMAC SHOWS
GREATER ABILITY TO COPE WITH DISSIDENT PROBLEM, WHICH
IS LIKELY TO GO ON UNABATED. IT IS TOO EARLY TO PRE-
DICT WHAT, IF ANY, IMPLICATIONS RESTRUCTURING MIGHT
HAVE FOR US POLICY VIS-A-VIS ETHIOPIA, ALTHOUGH
EMBASSY WILL BE WATCHING CAREFULLY FOR ANY SIGNS
THAT EMERGE OF CHANGING EPMG ATTITUDE TOWARD WEST.
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